

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACTIVITY REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2007 - 2008

ANN ARBOR OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND
PRESERVATION PROGRAM

PREPARED FOR:

THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR
GREENBELT ADVISORY COMMISSION
PARKLAND ADVISORY COMMISSION

PREPARED BY:
THE CONSERVATION FUND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GREENBELT.....	3
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	3
LAND PROTECTION	3
STRATEGIC DIRECTION	3
LAND ACQUISITIONS	4
LEVERAGING FUNDS	5
LANDOWNER OUTREACH.....	6
PARTNERSHIPS.....	6
PRESERVE WASHTENAW	6
FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET	6
STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2006 – 2007	6
GOALS FOR 2008-2009.....	8
PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS	9
STRATEGIC DIRECTION.....	9
LAND PROTECTION	9
FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET	10
STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2007 – 2008	10
GOALS FOR 2008 - 2009.....	10
APPENDICES.....	10

ACTIVITY REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2007 - 2008

ANN ARBOR OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

GREENBELT

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The City of Ann Arbor residents are fortunate enough to not only have a vibrant park system, but to also have open space surrounding the city that provides scenic vistas and attracts folks to this area. In 2003 residents had the insight to pass the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage, commonly referred to the Parks and Greenbelt program. Money is generated through a tax levy to purchase parkland within the City, as well as, to protect farmland, open spaces and natural areas within portions of 8 Townships surrounding Ann Arbor, known as the Greenbelt District. The purpose of the initiative is to provide funds to preserve and protect open space, natural habitats, farmland, and the City's source waters inside and outside the city limits.

Since the passage of the millage, the City has purchased an additional 30.05 acres of parkland. These parcels have added on to existing parkland, protected critical natural areas remaining in the City, and provided linkages between parks, increasing the viability of the overall park system. Furthermore, the City has helped to protect over 894 acres of working farmland and open space outside of the City. Protecting farmland provides many benefits to the Ann Arbor residents by protecting the rural, scenic vistas, local agricultural economy, as well as providing habitat for wildlife.

Furthermore, since 2003, Ann Arbor, Webster and Scio Townships located within the Greenbelt District have also passed similar millages, providing opportunities for the Greenbelt to leverage city funds and collaborate with other jurisdictions on land preservation.

LAND PROTECTION

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

As outlined in the Greenbelt's Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2005, the program has focused on forming large blocks of protected farmland and open space through the acquisition of easements, as well as protecting land along the Huron River. The Greenbelt identified 5 areas to concentrate acquisitions within the Greenbelt District to form these large blocks of protected land. The Commission continues to use the Strategic Plan to guide recommendations to Council on land acquisition.

Over the last 2 years, however, the City of Ann Arbor has witnessed several changes within the local economy and real estate market, which has had an effect on the Greenbelt Program. For one, there has been a notable downturn in the local residential real estate market. In addition, Pfizer has announced the closing of their Ann Arbor facility. This has all resulted in fewer developers buying land in the area and an increase in properties on the market and properties remaining on the market for a longer period of time. The Greenbelt Advisory Commission strategically responded to the changing real estate market to maximize the impact on land preservation by examining new partnership opportunities, leveraging funds and explored the expansion of the Greenbelt District boundary.

This year, the Greenbelt Commission recommended to City Council to expand the Greenbelt boundary, in order to provide more opportunities in those townships where there are significant public and or private dollars (through local land trusts) for land preservation. City Council approved the Commission's recommendation and expanded the Greenbelt District by one mile to the west in Webster and Scio Townships, one mile to the south in Pittsfield Township and one mile to the east in Superior Township.

This downturn in the housing market has also sparked on-going discussions amongst the Commission on appraisal practices, land values and the ever-changing real estate market. The Commission invited an appraiser, Mike Williams of the Gerald Alcock company in to speak to them on appraisal practices and recent land sales in the area. Julie Frost from Greenstone Farm Credit Services also came to speak to the Commission on agricultural land values and sales in the Ann Arbor area.

LAND ACQUISITIONS

To date, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 894 acres on working farms and natural areas. These properties have a total fair market value of \$13,474,254, with a cost to the Ann Arbor taxpayers at \$8,123,705. Thus, the City has contributed 60% of the purchase price.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, the Greenbelt completed 3 acquisitions. In July 2007, the City completed the purchase of development rights (PDR) deal on the John and Beverly Alexander Farm. The City received a grant from the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) for a portion of the Purchase of Development Rights.

In late 2007, the City partnered with Scio Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation to purchase the 49-acre Fox property, now referred to as the Fox Science Preserve. The site is an old gravel pit and has long been a field trip site for local students to learn about geology and botany. Washtenaw County contributed 50% towards the purchase price and owns and manages the site as a County Park. Both the City and Scio Township each contributed 25% of the funds toward the purchase price.

In June 2008, the City again partnered with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation to purchase 2 properties in Superior Township owned by Biltmore. These properties are prime examples of the down turn in the real estate market, as they were owned by local residential developer. Both parcels are located in close proximity to land already owned and protected by Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC). The parcels contain a mix of high-quality mature woodland, wetland, open

water and farmland. The 55-acre parcel includes a perennial stream and the boundary between the Rouge River and Huron River Watersheds. The 84-acre parcel consists of a large body of open water that hosts a mix of bird species. A portion of both parcels is currently farmland, and will continue to be leased to a farmer and remain in agricultural production. The County owns and will manage these sites as a County Park as well. Superior township contributed \$1,000 and Superior Land Conservancy contributed \$10,000 toward the purchase. Superior Land Conservancy will also assist the County with the management of the site.

LEVERAGING FUNDS

FRPP FUNDS RECEIVED

For the 2007 grant cycle, the City was awarded \$750,050 toward the purchase of the Merkel – Heller – Marr farm in Webster Township. This farm is adjacent to a farm already protected by the Greenbelt, making this a priority for the Greenbelt.

In spring of 2008, FRPP contacted agencies that had received funds in the 2007 grant cycle to solicit additional funding requests. The City submitted requests for additional funding on 8 properties in total and received an additional \$1.686 million for two of those properties. The two properties are adjacent to one another and potentially protect over 300 acres of active agriculture land. Both of those properties are also located in Ann Arbor Township, who will be a partner in the purchase of the development rights on the properties.

Since 2005, the City has secured over \$4.2 million from the FRPP program. The City has also partnered with other local agencies within the Greenbelt District, which also received FRPP grant funds.

LOCAL MONEY LEVERAGED

As discussed above, the City partnered with the Washtenaw County Parks and Scio Township on the purchase of the Fox Science Preserve. The purchase price for the 49-acre property was \$771,000 with the City contributing \$192,750, or 25% of the total purchase price.

The City also partnered with Washtenaw County Parks to purchase 2 parcels located in Superior Township for a total of 139 acres. The City contributed just under 50% of the purchase price, with the County contributing the majority of the remaining funds. The Superior Land Conservancy made a \$10,000 contribution toward the purchase and will assist the County in managing one of the parcels.

LANDOWNER OUTREACH

Due to the local economic and real estate markets, the City has experienced an increase in applications over the last year. In fact, the Greenbelt received twice as many applications during this year, as compared to the previous year. As such, no landowner forums were organized this year.

PARTNERSHIPS

PRESERVE WASHTENAW

Preserve Washtenaw is a collaborative group consisting of public agencies and private organizations in Washtenaw County, focused on land preservation. Preserve Washtenaw has informally been meeting for over 3 years, and this past year formed a charter to solidify communication among the groups. The City is an active member of Preserve Washtenaw. The purpose of Preserve Washtenaw is to serve as a coordinating body for ongoing public and private land protection efforts, ensuring the highest possible level of cooperation and communication, and least possible amount of duplication and overlap. The group also hopes to provide a virtual single point of entry for landowners interested in land protection and/or stewardship to reduce confusion for landowners. The partners include Washtenaw Land Trust, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Natural Area Program, Raisin Valley Land Trust, Washtenaw Land Trust, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Ann Arbor Township, Webster Township, Pittsfield Township, Scio Township, The City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County Planning and Environment.

STATE OF MICHIGAN

In collaboration with the Michigan Department of Agriculture's Farm and Open Space Program and Farm Bureau the Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program was highlighted in a Farmland Preservation Panel for the Michigan Association of Counties.

FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET

Financials for the fiscal year 2007-2008 attached.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2006 – 2007

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Applying for FRPP funds on 3 properties

THE GREENBELT APPLIED FOR FUNDING ON A TOTAL OF 9 PROPERTIES DURING THIS FISCAL YEAR AND RECEIVED FUNDING ON 3 OF THE PROPERTIES.

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Collaborating with Townships and County on applications

THE CITY PARTNERED WITH SCIO TOWNSHIP AND WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS ON ONE PURCHASE AND PARTNERED WITH THE COUNTY ON ANOTHER PURCHASE.

- Close on 2 new properties

THE GREENBELT CLOSED ON 3 DEALS DURING THIS FISCAL YEAR.

- Provide future leverage for Greenbelt funds by Encouraging Salem Township to apply for State PDR

SALEM TOWNSHIP IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR STATE PDR GRANT FUNDS.

- Meet with the Homebuilders and Commercial Lenders along with Preserve Washtenaw representatives for a review of properties in their inventory that might make good areas for farmland preservation, natural area and open space preservation

GREENBELT STAFF ALONG WITH WASHTENAW LAND TRUST AND WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS MET WITH MEMBERS OF THE WASHTENAW HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION.

- Develop a pilot registry program.

THE GREENBELT STAFF DEVELOPED A REGISTRY BROCHURE, HOWEVER, DUE TO THE INCREASE APPLICATIONS THIS FISCAL YEAR, THE GREENBELT HAS NOT FOCUSED ON A REGISTRY PROGRAM.

- Obtain at least 25% matching funds on all transactions from sources including local government, state government, federal government and landowner contributions.

THE GREENBELT HAS RECEIVED AT A MINIMUM 33% MATCHING FUNDS ON ALL LAND DEALS COMPLETED DURING THIS FISCAL YEAR.

- Explore ways to tangibly connect Ann Arbor taxpayers with the Greenbelt program, including but not limited to newsletters, events, and a Small Farms Initiative with Ann Arbor Township.

An advertisement was placed in the ann arbor observer, which provided an overview of the program and accomplishments to date. A one-page summary of the program and accomplishments was also developed to provide to partners, new commissioners or new city council members. The greenbelt staff has also been involved with the food system economic partnership's leadership team to explore area of overlap with local food production.

GOALS FOR 2008-2009

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Applying for FRPP funds on 3 properties.
- As part of the Greenbelt's ongoing discussions of value and the real estate market, release a Request for Proposals to be sent to developers and bankers who own property within the Greenbelt District in order for them to submit a price / acre bid if they wish to sell their property to the City's Greenbelt.
- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Collaborating with Townships and County on applications.
- Close on 4 new properties.
- Obtain at least 25% matching funds on all transactions from sources including local government, state government, federal government and landowner contributions.
- Continue to explore ways to tangibly connect Ann Arbor taxpayers with the Greenbelt program, including but not limited to newsletters, events, and a Small Farms Initiative with Ann Arbor Township.

PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

During last year, the Park Advisory Commission and staff utilized GIS to embark on a Strategic Planning process for parkland acquisitions. Through GIS, vacant parcels were identified and ranked based on their suitability for acquisition as a park. Separate ranking schema was developed for each of the four types of parks – neighborhood parks, community / active recreation parks, urban parks, and natural areas. The goal of this process is to provide a strategic approach to ensure the viability of the City's park system.

Through the strategic planning process, using GIS, staff was able to identify underserved neighborhoods. In an ideal system, every household should be within walking distance (¼ mile) of a neighborhood park (City of Ann Arbor PROS Plan F6). By using functions of GIS, the housing units not within walking distance of an existing neighborhood park were identified. This helps to ensure adequate access to the park system for all neighborhoods.

LAND PROTECTION

This year the City added an additional 3 parcels for a total of 17.3 new acres to the park system. In July 2007, the City of Ann Arbor completed the purchase of 2.5 acres of land adjacent to Eberwhite Woods. The property was purchased from the Zion Lutheran Church for \$580,000 dollars from the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage. The 2.5 acres are now part of the City's park inventory and will be maintained by Natural Area Preservation Staff. The adjacent property, owned by Ann Arbor Public Schools, Eberwhite Woods, is a popular natural area in the Old West Side neighborhood, bordered by Liberty Street and Eberwhite School.

In December 2007, the City of Ann Arbor accepted the donation of the vacant parcel located at 1805 Washtenaw Avenue. Douglas Crary had been the owner of the property. He served on the Ann Arbor Planning Commission and two terms on the Ann Arbor City Council. When Douglas Crary passed away in 2006, the property was left to his daughters, Rachel L Crary and Elizabeth A. Crary. To honor their father's wishes to have the parcel continued to be used as open space, the sisters approached the City to donate the vacant parcel to be used as a park for sledding and other recreational purposes. Neighborhood children currently use the hill on the property for sledding in the winter. The site will be used only for recreational purposes, and no playground equipment will be developed on the site.

Also in December 2007, the City of Ann Arbor completed the purchase of 13.5 acres from the Narrow Gauge Holdings Inc. and Sondra Gunn. The property was purchased from the landowners for \$1.8 million dollars from the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage.